

A Board of Selectmen's Town Hall to Small Business Community Meeting was held on Tuesday, February 23, 2010, at 7:00 p.m., at 619 High Street (former Christian Science Church), Dedham Square, Dedham, Massachusetts. **Present were:**

Michael L. Butler
Sarah E. MacDonald
James A. MacDonald
Carmen Dellolacono
Paul Reynolds

Representatives of Town Hall Present were: William Keegan, Town Administrator, Nancy Baker, Asst. Town Administrator, Karen O'Connell, Economic Development Director, Virginia LeClair, Environmental Coordinator, Robin Reyes, Deputy Finance Director, Mariellen Murphy, Finance Director, John Duffy, Director of Assessing, Joe Flanagan, DPW Director, David Field, Director of Engineering, Ken Cimeno, Building Commissioner, Chief William Cullinane, Dedham Fire Department, Lt. Michael D'Entremont, Dedham Police Department, Mary Allard, Board of Health Member, Leanne Jassett, Member, Board of Health, and Cathy Cardinale, Health Director.

Also present were: Representative Paul McMurtry, James Sayer, NSTAR Account Executive, and Augustine Pimental, NSTAR Program Manager.

Mr. Butler called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Mr. Butler thanked everyone for coming out this evening. He then introduced the Board of Selectmen to the audience—Ms. MacDonald, Mr. MacDonald, Mr. Dellolacono and Mr. Reynolds.

Mr. Butler gave a brief overview of this evening's agenda. He commented that there will be a few guest speakers from NSTAR. Also speaking will be-- Richard Bremer, Chairman, Board of Assessors and Sue McQuade, Neponset Valley Chamber of Commerce.

Mr. Butler introduce—Amy Haelson, Executive Director, Dedham Square Circle, Eileen Kelly, Mother Brook Association and Sue McQuade, Chairperson, Neponset Valley Chamber of Commerce. Mr. Butler introduced Dr. Louis Sawan—he thanked him for the use of his Function Hall for this evening's meeting.

Mr. Butler informed all that once the Guest Speakers have finished their portion of the meeting, he will introduce the Town Department Heads to answer questions.

Mr. Butler introduced Paul McMurtry, the Town's State Representative and local business owner. He also introduced Karen O'Connell, Economic Development Director. Ms. O'Connell welcomed everyone to the meeting—she was pleased with the great turnout. Ms. O'Connell briefly spoke on how business owners could save money relative to their energy costs. Continuing on relative to this subject matter, Ms. O'Connell welcomed Augustine Pimental, NSTAR Program Manager. He spoke to audience and gave an overview of the NSTAR Programs.

Mr. Pimental informed all that he runs the NSTAR C.I. Program and this program caters to small businesses. Mr. Pimental commented that conservation is everyone's problem, i.e., energy, water, etc. Mr. Pimental assured all that he was not here this evening to sell anything, but to give away.

Mr. Pimenthal explained that NSTAR offers programs to save energy and incentive money to help pay for energy savings. He commented that NSTAR has a great deal of money relative to this program—10.5 million dollars this year for Energy Programs. This money for the programs comes from the rate payers. Mr. Pimenthal further explained that he takes this money and creates programs that are designed to give back to the customers. These programs serve small, medium and large establishments -- audits are free of charge. Mr. Pimenthal spoke of the pros and cons of the programs and encouraged all to participate going forward—NSTAR pays up to 70% reimbursement and also offers a 0%, one-year loan for participants. Representative McMurtry asked Mr. Pimenthal if NSTAR could give more consideration to small businesses.

John Sayer, also with NSTAR, spoke to the audience on how NSTAR has saved the Town of Dedham money with respect to the Energy Efficient Programs NSTAR offers. Mr. Reynolds asked Mr. Sayer if NSTAR were Green Tech—Mr. Sayer responded, Wind Turbines. Mr. Reynolds asked if NSTAR presently had an incentive for solar. Mr. Sayer responded that presently, NSTAR does not; however, there are some pilot Green Programs in the Town of Marshfield, Massachusetts. Mr. Reynolds informed the NSTAR representatives that the Town of Dedham has an active Green Program and is waiting for NSTAR to take part. Ms. O'Connell commented -- The bottom line is when you take part in these types of Energy Programs, money is saved. Mr. Butler thanked the gentlemen from NSTAR for taking part in this evening's meeting.

At this point in the meeting, Mr. Butler introduced Richard Bremer, Chairman, Board of Assessors, to explain how properties in the Town of Dedham are assessed. Mr. Bremer introduced himself to the audience. Additionally, he introduced John Duffy, Director of Assessing. Mr. Bremer invited everyone to visit Mr. Duffy and staff at the Town Hall if they need assistance.

Mr. Bremer informed all that the Commercial Rate is --175% rate. He went on to say that when a piece of property is sold, a computerized system calculates relative to the market values across the State.

Mr. Bremer informed all that the Town of Dedham is presently stable-- there is a stable tax base for the Town's expenses. He went on to say that when a piece of commercial property is assessed too high, the owner has an opportunity to file for abatement; however, the Tax Bill must be paid on time. After payment, an owner can file for the abatement listing expenses and income.

Mr. Bremer explained the differences between residential/commercial properties. Residential assessments are determined by evaluating comparable houses in the Town of Dedham—some may be unique. Mr. Bremer commented that commercial property is a bit more complicated. Mr. Bremer went on to say that the Board of Assessors take abatements very seriously and that possibly an error might have occurred in evaluation/calculation--he encouraged owners to feel free to file for abatements if they wished.

George Won, Blue Jay Sandwich Shop, Sprague Street, questioned the double amount of taxes for businesses. He asked if the Assessors could take into consideration small businesses—possibly a smaller business could receive a decrease break in the commercial rate. Mr. Bremer informed Mr. Won that under the present tax structure, the Assessors are not able to do this—the structure does not make a distinction between large and small businesses; however, Mr. Bremer thought this was not a bad idea. He went on to say that presently, the Assessors must follow the statute.

Mr. Bremer explained that the tax base is based on the split rate/commercial. This rate gives the Town the ability to address its financial needs and decreases the burden to residential homeowners—he did not think the split rate would change.

At this point of the meeting, Mr. Butler introduced all the Town Department Heads to the audience. He asked if anyone had questions or concerns that they wished to express to the staff.

A business owner in Dedham Square asked a question relative to the Snow Removal Operations in Dedham Square. He asked Mr. Flanagan whose responsibility it is to clear the sidewalks in front of the businesses. The businessman commented that clearing of the crosswalks is much better. Relative to this question, Mr. Flanagan informed the gentleman that the Town of Dedham cleans snow off of the sidewalks and crosswalks in Dedham Square. Additionally, business owners also clean snow off of the sidewalks.

Mr. Reynolds encouraged all to contact the Board of Selectmen on the Town's Website/ Fresh Ideas relative to concerns, needs and what is keeping you up at night. He went on to say that the Board welcomes your questions.

Anthony Caruso, Owner, Centre Deli, High Street, Dedham Square, had concerns with Fire Trucks in Dedham Square. Mr. Keegan responded that there is no Truck Ban on Washington Street; however, he will check further.

Lou Tedeschi, Automotive Service Plus, River /Milton Street, asked when the Town was going to do something with the land relative to the Railroad Tracks behind his business on River Street. Mr. Tedeschi mentioned the proposed Walking Trail. Mr. Butler informed all that the Town has taken ownership of the Orphan Line. He went on to say that over the years, people have abused this area. Additionally, there are no specific plans set for the area behind his property at this time. Mr. Butler commented that the Board will see where the Orphan Line fits during discussions at their Goal Session Meeting in the spring. Mr. Tedeschi informed Mr. Butler that commercial owners would have use for this particular parcel of land.

Steve MacAusland, resident, asked if the Orphan Line was looked at in the Open Space Plan. He added—if not, it should be looked at going forward. Virginia LeClair, Environmental Coordinator, and a member of the Open Space Advisory Committee, informed all that the 50% of the Open Space Plan draft is complete. She commented that creating a Walking Path in this area was discussed at a recent Public Meeting. Ms. LeClair went on to say that this suggestion has been brought up for years.

Karen O'Connell, Economic Development Director, informed all that there are presently 1,400 employees at Legacy Place that are an untapped customer base for the small business in Dedham. She discussed the possibility of Delivery Services to those employees—she did not think the employees were eating at the higher-priced establishments at Legacy Place. Ms. O'Connell went on to say that businesses would only need a small percentage to make it worth their while. Ms. O'Connell informed all that she will speak with the small business owners, i.e., restaurants, Dry Cleaners, etc., relative to this suggestion to see if there might be an interest in tapping into the Legacy Place employee base.

Mr. MacAusland thanked Town for hiring Karen O'Connell and Virginia LeClair. He complimented their efforts in bringing in new businesses and grant money to the Town. Mr. MacAusland asked if some assessment measurements could be gathered relative to their successes.

Mr. Keegan informed all that he has a quality team assembled. Due to the fine group of people on his team, it makes his job easier. He went on to say that because of their successes, he will present his 9th balance budget this year -- this is a credit to the community. Mr. Keegan commented that the Town of Dedham is in an enviable position around the State.

Mr. Reynolds asked the group assembled to introduce themselves and explain their business. The following businesses responded: Representative from the Dedham Woman's Exchange, Janet Reynolds, Blue Bunny, Anthony Caruso, Centre Deli, Martha Kelly, Lou Tedeschi and Tony Bruno, Automotive Plus, John Grasso, Halfway Café, Representatives from the Needham Bank and Dedham Savings, Representative Paul McMurtry, Dedham Community Theatre, Xeno, Kouzina Restaurant, Representative from Paradise Café, Steve Carlson, Mocha Java and Russell Stamp, Accountant.

Relative to the recycling Program, Ms. LeClair commented that some businesses are presently recycling; however, there are more businesses that would like to recycle going forward-- Ms. LeClair will assist. Ms. LeClair informed all that she will be working to develop a Green Business Award in the Spring—she added that Dedham is ripe for Solar Energy and will explain to business owners how they can get involved. Mr. Butler commented that since the new program has gone into effect, the Town has gone from 12% to 32% in just three months.

Mr. Butler introduced Sue McQuade, President, Neponset Valley Chamber of Commerce. Ms. McQuade complimented the Town Hall Staff. She went on to say that it has been a pleasure for her to work with all the business in Dedham to make them aware of the many services available through the Chamber. Ms. McQuade informed all that members have access to many companies/contacts and that being part of the Chamber is good personally and professionally.

Ms. McQuade added-- The Chamber supports the business community-- 150 businesses give discounts to other Chamber Members and it is a great resource to network with a good group of people. Ms. MacQuade highlighted opportunities such as Business Seminars free of charge and a great website to find out what is going on. Ms. McQuade informed all that the Chamber does a great deal with Economic Development and she is a lobbyist for the Town of Dedham.

In conclusion, Mr. Butler thanked everyone for coming out this evening. The Board of Selectmen and Department Heads remained after the meeting to answer questions and speak further with members of the audience.

The meeting adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

This is to certify that the above is a true and accurate record of the Minutes of the Board of Selectmen's Meeting held on February 23, 2010, which Minutes were approved on July 8, 2010.

Michael L. Butler, Chairman

